

New guard vs. environmental threats

The heads of the 35 leading aging organizations and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) have announced plans to develop a new “Aging Initiative” to examine environmental health threats to older persons.

The Initiative will examine the impact that a rapidly growing aging population will have on ecosystems and will encourage retirees to volunteer in their own communities to reduce hazards and protect the environment for future generations.

This will be the first coordinated approach by the agency to address environmental hazards that affect health.

Texas is one of five states where public meetings will be held in the Spring to get input for the Initiative. The others are California, Florida, Iowa and Pennsylvania, along with Washington, D.C.

Speaking on behalf of the 50-member Leadership Council of Aging Organizations (LCAO), James Firman, president of the National Council on the Aging

says, “We commend the EPA for focusing on the health and safety of older Americans. We know many LCAO members will want to work with the EPA to educate seniors about such threats and promote civic engagement of seniors nationwide in combating these problems.”

Among older people there is an increasing number who are at risk of chronic diseases and disabling conditions that may be caused or exacerbated by environmental conditions. Hazards that may adversely impact the health of older people are lead, indoor and outdoor air pollution, microorganisms in water and pesticides. As part of the Initiative, the agency will build on ongoing projects.

The Aging Initiative will draw on the expertise of professionals and researchers at the federal, state and local levels in the fields of environment and health.

The EPA will also work with the public and service provider organizations dealing with the aging population. ■